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Creem

TRAFFIC & DEATH ON THE STREET:

A Luridly Complete
Compendium of Drugs
And What They
Can Do To You

RICK WAKEMAN

Says No About YES

FRANK ZAPPA's

Secret Signals

We're Only In It For
The Money: **STILLS** on

CROSBY, NASH

and YOUNG

An Exclusive Interview

ELTON JOHN's

Dreem Band

BLUE OYSTER CULT

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BRYAN FERRY's

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FLO & EDDIE



THIS MAGAZINE CAN SAVE
YOUR LIFE
(SEE PAGE 40)

Working For Peanuts:



Rick Wakeman's Final Days With YES

by Gordon Fletcher

Going on the road with Yes probably isn't what you'd call "fun," but it does have its moments. Don't expect to tear apart any hotel rooms or ravish any delirious young maidens should you be asked to tour with them, but if you're the sort who revels in heavy scripture reading and candle burning after a show, these guys are for you.

Maybe that's a bit of exaggeration, on second thought, 'cos the first Yes-man I encountered during my recent stint with them was Mr. Rick Wakeman, and he's nothing like the above categorization. Hell, no!, the sexists among us might even be tempted to call him a REAL MAN, although the differences spawning that assertion are far more comparative than concrete. You see, Wakeman hates health food.

"I'll take everything on the left side of the menu please," he roared at the waitress as we sat down to our evening meal. "Eat up, it's on Uncle Rick," he challenged us, and for a moment or so it seemed as though he really was going to order the equivalent of a side of beef. Oh well, he was in a bad mood: one of the newer roadies discovered that day how easy it was to blast out one of Wakeman's precious monitors. The roadie thought it was funny, or at least he did until Wakeman angrily growled "the next one comes out of your pocket" so loud that everybody in the arena stopped dead in his tracks.

It's all in a day's work, though, and come dinner-time Wakeman takes out his frustrations on steak, spare-ribs, beer, et al. while the others are off feasting on assorted fruits, nuts and cheeses. "I'm no carrot-cruncher," he says, "when I finish eating I like to feel full."

Not only wouldn't Wakeman eat with the rest of Yes (though that probably could have been arranged were Squire, Howe and the rest to try a hamburger), but he also preferred not to socialize with them. "That's the way it should be," he explained, "when you get down to it it's the music that's the most important thing. If you're in a band with people who are close friends, that friendship inhibits the give-and-take that's needed to raise musical standards. You might hear something that you don't like, but rather than complain you'd worry about hurting your friends'

feelings and forget it — so the music suffers."

Yes obviously don't have that problem. I witnessed no pugilism while I was with them, but I did see Wakeman and Jon Anderson have a less-than-friendly discussion, and not once did the buddy-buddy comraderie that surrounds almost all other touring bands evidence itself.

After a show, amongst the heaps of chilled goats milk, whole wheat wafers and a single tray of chicken and pepperoni marked "for Rick only," Yes go through the process of winding down. Suddenly a hapless journalist happens upon them, and Anderson casually asks him "what did you think of the show?" The scribe stutters, and suddenly the whole band's attention is on him.

"C'mon, out with it," says one of them, to which the scribe blushing admits, "I found it boring — how come you guys can't do a song?" Suddenly a communal "Oh shit!" drops over the room, broken only by the voices of four Yessers singing passages from the *Topo*-whatever. "It's got plenty of songs," says Anderson, but the damage is done.

The next day brought another plane ride (Piedmont, again — I think their pilots must have bus drivers' licenses) to still another city and another concert. It also brought the first extended opportunity to talk to Jon Anderson. Everybody probably thinks he's miniscule, but that's only because he's always standing next to Chris Squire who's a goddamned hulk at 6'4". Though Anderson is a bit on the slight side (5'7" to be exact) the iron rod in his back makes him seem ten feet tall at times. He is the boss.

Anderson writes most of Yes' material, arranges the productions, and generally cracks the whip to make sure that things are moving forward. Moving forward, or "musically progressing" as Yes always puts it, is something Anderson is constantly concerned with — "we have to learn more about music and use our knowledge to make it more complex." Thus the pressures for musical growth are incredible within the group structure, so much so that two members quit in protest and another was thrown out when the others determined he wasn't up to snuff. Yet Anderson claims he

Mark It and Strike It

Crammed onto the overtaxed stage at the west end of the Toronto Maple Leaf Gardens (right about the space where diminutive Doug Favell tends goal for the Maple Leafs) sits over \$250,000 worth of props and musical paraphernalia. Besides the obvious mounds of amplifiers and microphones, there is enough colored plastic strewn and hanging about to supply Japanese toy factories for a fortnight. In front of the band lay misshapen plastic boulders, green and ominous and obviously rifled from someone's topographic rock garden; in another setting it might have passed for excelsior from packing crates. Off to the right and overhead floats a huge row of what is probably meant to be a series of whale's rib bones. They angle down toward the rear of the stage in seemingly perfect perspective from wherever you sit. At crucial moments in the music they flash a blinding red, descending strobes from end to end. Hovering overhead and filling fully fifty percent

of the remaining space are a huge green pair of what were probably meant to be Manta Ray wings; attached to a motor backstage, they flap majestically, at times threatening to become airborne and take the whole Bacchanale with them.

As imposing as all this may seem to the uninitiate, it is only the beginning. Once the music starts, so do the lights, splashing the stage with torrents of color — and from a huge crystalline disc mounted high over the stage, the audience is dotted with sparkles of light. And added to this are banks of dry ice fog rising from behind the first buttress of speakers, settling on the first five rows of onlookers.

The band's dress is basic Wizard of Id garb. Howe's is long white and spectre-like, Squire's long and sparkled. Wakeman alternates robes of silver sequin and robes of gold sequin, both obliterating the even more basic faded jeans and mangy green t-shirt of off-stage dress.

Al Niester



could see it all unfolding from the start.

"Yeah, even in the early days I had a good idea where we were headed. We've always wanted to be able to hold an audience's attention for an extended length of time, and it was only a matter of time before we found the personnel that enabled the band to do it."

To Anderson's way of thinking Steve Howe was the real catalyst to Yes' development along the lines he liked, in fact when asked to list the most important events in the band's history "Steve's joining" are always the first words off Anderson's lips. "When he came around it enabled us to do so much more — he learned me an awful lot about music and that really helped our music to grow."

As for Mr. Howe himself, he's alternately the most lucid and opaque Yesman to talk to. He's intelligent, but sometimes tends to talk himself out onto tangents. Amongst his ubiquitous comments he's a few words on why Yes never seem to have any fun onstage.

"What we play is not easy — we're trying to tell a story with our music. When you come onstage it's never easy to portray something you've recorded — how does a group get its studio portrayals onstage, and how do the Beachboys try to do *Surf's Up*? — and because of that we're under a lot of pressure when we perform, especially at the start of a tour when we've got new music to grasp."

Heavy commentary if you can understand what he's trying to say; Eddie Offord seems to but prefers to stick to more tangible musical concepts. Offord is the band's producer, mixer, recorder, engineer and all-around electronic wizard, a small mouse of a man who travels everywhere with the band. Offord at this point is walking around apologetically, explaining that the show is just beginning to hit stride and that anybody watching Yes should just give them a little more time to get it together.

"In a week's time this is really gonna be rockin'" he declares, "there's so many things to get together."

Offord wants very badly to get Yes back into a more funky groove; he was quoted as saying that the addition of Alan White on drums was going to do the trick. But in private he admits that it hasn't been all he hoped it would be.

"Oh, it's a step in the right direction. I mean when this band really gets going it swings in a way it never did when Billy (Bruford) was drumming. But they've still got a way to go — things could sure get a whole lot funkier."

But just how much more funkier this crew will ever get is questionable. Though they were dropped from the hip social register immediately following *The Yes Album*, it was only at that



Richard Kwasniewski

Rick Wakeman has Euell Gibbons Nightmares

Well, what do *you* think is the reason that Rick Wakeman has quit Yes? Either he was kicked out to spend the rest of his life in a pub, or he went voluntarily. Rick may have just fallen out of step with the Shastric shuffle.

If it was a question of diet, we wouldn't be surprised. Four Yespeople are vegetarians, and Rick did call what they eat "what I bring up in the morning after a heavy night's drinking." That's hostile enough, but when you're the only drinker besides, fruits and nuts can get to a person. Even a Yesperson as rich and famous as Rick. And if the intestinal tract was the last straw, his split bears out a bit of wisdom spewed by another rich and famous rockster, Frank Zappa, who of course said, "You are what you eat."

But then, maybe it was in the musical muscle of the band. From *Close To*

The Edge, a point in time where we can safely say the band was still unified, Yes went to the ocean and Rick went deep into the center of the earth. And we mean deep: it cost him \$80,000 to produce *Journey To The Center Of The Earth*. "I put a lot of work into that thing," he says. Well, we'll accept that: a piece of music five years in the writing, the coordination of a symphony orchestra, a choir, two singers and a rock band that has never played so much as a lick together. Plus sixteen hours a day for five days to get it down right. Plus mixing the tapes personally until four hours before the Yesbird flies away to its American tour. Classically trained and restrained from the age of six, Wakeman is a nut for his own sound, and we don't mean the kind he won't eat.

point that the band really took off. *Close To The Edge* and *Tales From Topographic Oceans* seemed to satisfy some mass craving for rock-as-art spectacle, and subsequently made it possible for Rick Wakeman to depart in search of his own vast horizons. Chances are that Wakeman's exit won't disturb the band's balance nearly as much as one

might think. Yes has never had to depend on personality in the traditional rock & roll sense. Their collective identity is defined by the proportions of their show; their success has been a matter of one-upping themselves. And that's the way it's likely to stay, at least until they come up against a bigger gun.